

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
16 April 2009 (16.04.2009)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2009/046973 A1

(51) International Patent Classification:
A61F 2/90 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/EP2008/008502

(22) International Filing Date: 8 October 2008 (08.10.2008)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
11/973,707 9 October 2007 (09.10.2007) US

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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

- with international search report
- before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments

(54) Title: FLEXIBLE STENT WITH TORQUE-ABSORBING CONNECTORS

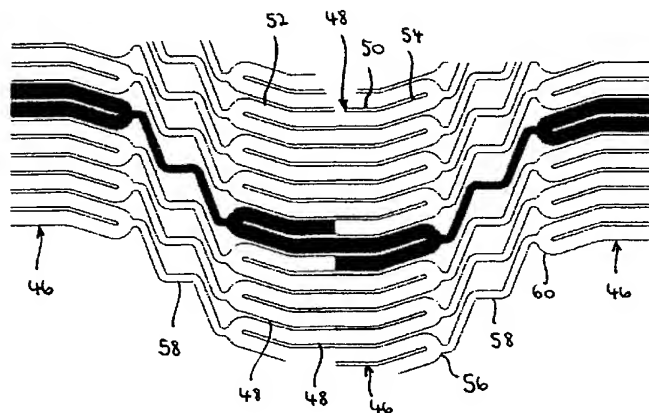


FIG. 5

(57) Abstract: The present invention concerns a stent with a highly flexible structure that is configured to provide an elevated degree of vessel scaffolding and to absorb torque applied on the stent. In one embodiment, the stent of the present invention includes an essentially tubular body formed by a web structure that is composed of a plurality of longitudinally adjacent web rings (46), each including a plurality of web elements that are disposed circumferentially around the longitudinal axis of the stent and that are adjoined one to the other by a junction bend (56). Each junction bend (56) in a first web ring is coupled to another junction bend (60) in a neighboring ring by a connector (58) having a step-wise configuration, in which a central segment of the connector is disposed essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the stent and may become twisted to absorb torque imposed on the stent.

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FLEXIBLE STENT WITH TORQUE-ABSORBING CONNECTORS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application is a continuation in part application of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 11/805,584 filed on May 20, 2007, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to a medical device. More particularly, the present invention relates to a flexible stent that provides elevated torque-absorbing properties.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Atherosclerosis, sometimes called the hardening or clogging of the arteries, is an accumulation of cholesterol and fatty deposits, called plaque, on the inner walls of the arteries. Atherosclerosis causes a partial or total blockage of the arteries and, consequently, a reduced blood flow to the heart, legs, kidneys, or brain.

[0004] Traditionally, clogged arteries have been treated with surgical procedures that involve the removal of the diseased arterial tract. Angioplasty procedures, during which a stent is inserted in the diseased portion of the artery, have gained increased acceptance during the last two decades because of the reduced complexity of this procedure in comparison with other surgical procedures and because of the consequent reduction in risk and discomfort to the patient.

[0005] Referring first to FIG. 1, a stent 20 is a small tubular element that typically has a cylindrical structure 22 and that, once placed within a blocked vessel, acts as a scaffold that keeps the vessel open. Stent 20 may be implanted in a bodily vessel by disposing the stent over a

balloon tipped catheter, by driving the stent to a target location in a vessel, and by subsequently inflating the balloon at the target location.

[0006] Alternatively, stent 20 may be caused to self-expand without the use of a balloon by manufacturing stent 20 from a shape memory material and by disposing stent 20 over a catheter in a contracted delivery configuration. Stent 20 is successively driven to a target location in a vessel, where a sheath covering stent 20 is withdrawn and stent 20 is allowed to self-expand. One type of self-expanding stent is produced from a superelastic material and is compressed inside the sheath into a contracted delivery configuration. When the stent is released from the sheath, the flexible material causes the stent to spring back to its original shape and size before compression. Another type of self-expanding stent is produced from a thermo-elastic shape-memory material that is formed into a desired size and shape and is then annealed at a temperature higher than a transition temperature. After cooling the stent to a temperature below the transition temperature, the stent becomes soft and can be reduced to a smaller size by crimping, so that it can be delivered to the target location, where the stent is warmed to a temperature above the transition temperature and returns to the preprogrammed size and shape. The present invention relates to both to balloon expandable stents and to self-expanding stents, as explained in greater detail in the following sections.

[0007] The stents in the prior art are formed as a metal mesh or, in general, as a web structure that provides some degree of flexibility. Certain types of anatomies require that stents with elevated degrees of flexibility be employed, for example, stents to be implanted in the carotid artery, because the bifurcated anatomy of the carotid artery and frequent movements of that part of the body require a stent that can adapt to such anatomy. The stent designs in the prior art typically increase flexibility by increasing cells size in the mesh or in the web structure. Therefore, whenever stent flexibility is increased in the stents in the prior art, scaffolding support is affected negatively due to the related reduction in web density.

[0008] A prior art stent is disclosed in U.S. Patent 5,104,404, which teaches an articulated stent in which stent segments, formed by diamond-shaped cells disposed in ring form, are connected one to the other at some but not all of the tips of the diamond-shaped cells. This arrangement provides for a stent with a high degree of longitudinal flexibility, but also for limited support to the arterial walls at the junctions areas between the different stent segments.

[0009] With reference now to FIG. 2, other designs in the prior art have attempted to

increase stent flexibility by forming the stent as a plurality of web rings 24 that are disposed longitudinally along tubular body 22 and that are coupled one to the other by flexible connectors 26. Designs of this type are disclosed in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 10/743,857; U.S. Patent Nos. 6,682,554 and 6,602,285, International Application PCT/EP99/06456, and German Patent Application Serial No. 19840645.2, the entireties of which are incorporated herein by reference. The function of flexible connectors 26 is to facilitate the bending of stent 20 by creating longitudinal segments softer than web rings 24. At the same time, flexible connectors 26 transmit torque from one web ring 24 to adjacent web rings 24 when a bending force is applied to tubular body 22 or when a radial force is applied to tubular body 22, for example, during deployment of stent 22 from the contracted delivery configuration to the expanded delivery configuration. Such a transmission of torque may cause different web rings 24 to rotate differentially upon application of a bending force or upon deployment of stent 20.

[0010] One example of stent construction based on longitudinally alternating of web rings coupled by flexible connectors can be found in U.S. Patent No. 6,190,403, which discloses a stent having a plurality of web rings disposed in longitudinal order. Each of the web rings is formed by longitudinally-oriented cells disposed circumferentially and is joined to a neighboring web ring by sinusoidal connectors that couple cell tips that are longitudinally aligned one with the other. The stent of the '403 patent provides an elevated degree of scaffolding to the arterial walls, though its structure provides only for a limited degree of longitudinal flexibility due to the limited extent of longitudinal translation that is possible between web rings when a compressive force is applied.

[0011] Another example of stent construction based on longitudinally alternating web rings coupled by flexible connectors can be found in U.S. Patent No. 6,451,049, which discloses a stent having a plurality of waveform rings coupled by longitudinal connectors that include a "U" bend. This construction also provides for an elevated degree of scaffolding of the vessel walls, but its flexibility is constrained by the limited ability to compress of the flexible segments.

[0012] In order to increase stent flexibility, stent designs have been introduced in which the flexible connectors between web rings do not have a longitudinal orientation but instead have a transverse orientation. Examples of such stent designs can be found in U.S. Patent Nos. 5,980,552; 6,059,811; 6,508,834; and 6,589,276. The transverse orientation of the flexible connectors induce the web rings to rotate one in relation to the other upon the application of a

bending or radial force to the stent, and in order to reduce torsional stress in the stent during bending and during expansion, the flexible connectors may have alternating directions. For example, the flexible connectors connecting two neighboring rings may be oriented in a direction opposite to the direction of the next set of flexible connectors. If the web rings are prevented from rotating, the torsional stress in the stent becomes absorbed by the flexible connectors and by the web rings, possibly causing the connectors to warp along their entire length. Additionally, this type of construction causes a foreshortening of the stent during expansion.

[0013] This problem is illustrated in greater detail in FIGS. 3A-3B. A typical connector 28 couples first web ring 30 to second web ring 32 by connecting junction bend 34 on first ring 30 to junction bend 36 on second ring 32. In order for stent 38 to provide an elevated degree of scaffolding to the vessel within which stent 38 is implanted, each junction bend 34 on web ring 30 is coupled to a junction bend 36 in web ring 32, increasing stent density. The higher the density of stent 38, however, the lower the flexibility, which may be increased by increasing the length of connector 28.

[0014] When the length of connector 28 is increased, the bending capability and the flexibility of stent 38 is increased correspondingly because the moment applied by connector 28 to web rings 30 and 32 upon the application of a bending force on stent 34 is increased correspondingly. Unfortunately, long connectors disposed transversally on stent 38 can extend along a significant amount of the outer circumference of stent 38. For example, if stent 38 has a diameter of 1.6 mm and if connector 28 is one mm long, connector 28 extends for approximately 72 degrees along the circumference of stent 38. In turn, long connectors 28 will exert a significant amount of torque on junction bends 34 and 36, and, consequently, on web rings 30 and 32, and may warp along their entire length. In addition, long connectors 28 cause the size of stent cells to increase during expansion, therefore, long connectors cause a reduction in the scaffolding properties of stent 20, or a reduction in the ability of stent 20 to effectively support the vessel, into which stent 20 is implanted.

[0015] By having long connectors 28 disposed in a direction essentially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of stent 20, connector 28 also tend to retain the bend radius of stent 20 during expansion and to cause a distortion of stent 20 in the expanded configuration.

[0016] Attempts have been made in the prior art to provide long connectors that extend along relatively limited portions of the circumference of stent 38 and that increase vessel support. For

example, U.S. Patent Nos. 5,449,373; 6,203,569; 6,740,114; 6,790,227; 6,942,689; 6,955,686; 6,998,060; 6,679,911; and 6,875,228 disclose stent constructions, in which the connectors have a variety of shapes in the form of the letters "M", "N", "W" or similar shapes, but which all include a plurality of segments oriented at certain angles with respect to the longitudinal axis of the stent. In particular, each of the prior art designs contains one or more central segments that are oriented at an angle with respect to the longitudinal axis of the stent, causing rotations in different degrees upon the application of a torsional force on the connector, for example due to a bending of the stent or during expansion.

[0017] Therefore, it would be desirable to provide a stent that generates an elevated degree of scaffolding to a bodily vessel while remaining highly flexible.

[0018] It would also be desirable to provide a stent, in which long connectors can be employed to increase stent flexibility and that can absorb torsional forces applied to the stent without warping along their entire lengths.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0019] A stent according to the present invention exhibits a highly flexible structure and elevated scaffolding properties, and at the same time is configured to absorb torque applied on the stent by bending or radial forces.

[0020] The stent according to the present invention is expandable from a contracted delivery configuration to an expanded deployed configuration and includes an essentially tubular body formed by a plurality of web rings disposed longitudinally. Each of the web rings is defined by a plurality of web elements that are disposed circumferentially and that, in the contracted delivery configuration, are substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the tubular body. Pairs of the web elements are sequentially adjoined at junction bends, and a junction bend in a first web ring is coupled to a junction bend in a neighboring web ring by one of the connectors.

[0021] Each of the connectors is formed by a plurality of segments disposed in a step-wise configuration. At least one of the connector segments is situated in a central position within the connector and is disposed with an orientation essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the stent. These connectors couple junction bends that are laterally offset one in relation to the other, making the connectors span diagonally along the profile of the tubular body.

[0022] The second segment may be rectilinear in shape and become twisted to acquire a helical curvature when a bending or expansion stress is applied to the stent. In one embodiment, the central element may be pre-deformed with a helical curvature in the contracted delivery configuration that becomes more accentuated during a bending or expansion of the stent. The central element may also be manufactured to have a cross-sectional area that is different from the cross-sectional areas of the end segments.

[0023] In one embodiment, each of the junction bends in the first web ring is connected to one junction bend in one neighboring web ring by one connector, so that each junction bend in one web ring is coupled to another junction bend in an adjacent web ring.

[0024] The stent of the present invention may be manufactured from a variety of materials, including metallic materials and plastic materials. When the stent is to be self-expanding, Nitinol or another shape memory material may be employed, while a balloon-expandable stent may be manufactured from stainless steel or other biocompatible metallic or plastic material. All or part of the stent (for example, the connector) may also be manufactured from a biodegradable material, for example, from a plastic absorbing material. In addition, the stent of the present invention may include a number of ancillary features known in the art, for example, may be coated with a bioactive agent or contain radio-opaque markers.

[0025] Methods of use of the stent according to the present invention are also provided.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

[0026] The drawings constitute a part of this specification and include exemplary embodiments of the invention, which may be embodied in various forms. It is to be understood that in some instances various aspects of the invention may be shown exaggerated or enlarged to facilitate an understanding of the invention.

[0027] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an essentially tubular body of a stent.

[0028] FIGS. 2 is a front view of a stent connector according to the prior art.

[0029] FIGS. 3A illustrates a configuration of stent connector according to the prior art, and FIG. 3B is a schematic top view of the essentially tubular body of a stent highlighting the span of the connector of FIG. 3B when disposed within the tubular body.

[0030] FIG. 4 is a perspective view of one embodiment of the present invention, showing the stent pattern in a detail view.

[0031] FIG. 5 is a detail view, illustrated as a flattened surface, of the web structure of a stent according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0032] FIG. 6 is a detail view of the web structure of FIG. 5.

[0033] FIG. 7 is a schematic plan view of a connector connecting two neighboring junction bends according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0034] FIGS. 8 is a perspective view of the connector of FIG. 7.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

[0035] The present invention relates to stent designs that can absorb an elevated degree of torque during expansion and after implantation in a patient while at the same time providing a highly flexible stent structure. One application of the present invention relates to closed cell stents, in particular, carotid stents, for which an elevated degree of lesion scaffolding and the capability of conforming to tortuous anatomies are key design features.

[0036] Detailed descriptions of embodiments of the invention are provided herein. It is to be understood, however, that the present invention may be embodied in various forms. Therefore, the specific details disclosed herein are not to be interpreted as limiting, but rather as a representative basis for teaching one skilled in the art how to employ the present invention in virtually any detailed system, structure, or manner.

[0037] Referring to FIG. 4, a stent 40 constructed according to the principles of the present invention includes an essentially tubular body 42 expandable from a contracted delivery configuration to an expanded deployed configuration. While body 42 is depicted in FIG. 4 as essentially cylindrical in shape, body 42 may be provided with other shapes, for example, with a frustoconical shape or with the shape of a hyperboloid.

[0038] Body 42 is defined by a web structure 44, shown in FIG. 4 only in a detail view that relates to the contracted delivery configuration. Web structure 44 includes a plurality of web elements 46, each formed by a plurality of crowns 48.

[0039] Referring now to FIG. 5, each crown 48 includes a central member 50 having a first end member 52 and a second end member 54 extending respectively from the opposite ends of central member 50. Central member 50, first end member 52 and second end member 54 are each essentially linear in shape, and, in the contracted delivery configuration of stent 40, central member 50 is disposed essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of body 42 (see also FIG. 4),

while first and second members 52 and 54 extend from central member 50 at obtuse angles. Preferably, first and second members 52 and 54 extend from central member 50 at the same angle, but in other embodiments, first and second members 52 and 54 may extend from central member 50 at different angles. In still other embodiments, one or more of central member 50 and first and second members 52 and 54 may be non-rectilinear and have a curved shape.

[0040] Crowns 48 are nested one into the other in the contracted delivery configuration and are sequentially adjoined at one end by a junction bend 56 that exhibits an essentially arcuate shape. A series of crowns 48 is disposed circumferentially about the longitudinal axis of body 42 to form web rings 46, which are joined one to the other by connectors 58. As shown in FIG. 5, the crowns in one web ring may be disposed with an orientation that is opposite to the orientation of the crowns in a neighboring web ring. In the illustrated embodiment, two adjacent web rings are disposed with an orientation of crowns 48 that is 180 degrees different one from the other.

[0041] Stent 40 may be manufactured from a variety of biocompatible materials, including metal and plastic materials. For example but not by way of limitation, stent 40 may be manufactured from Nitinol or other shape memory material if a self-expanding configuration of stent 40 is desired, or from stainless steel if balloon expansion is foreseen. Alternatively, stent 40 may be manufactured from a plastic material that enables either a permanent stent placement or a temporary stent placement, for example, from a plastic absorbing material.

[0042] In some embodiments, crowns 48 and connectors 58 may be manufactured from a biodegradable material when it is expected that only temporary vessel support is required. In another embodiment, only connectors 58 may be manufactured from a biodegradable material, so that the scaffolding provided by stent 40 may change over time and connectors 58 will gradually dissolve in the fluid carried by the vessel (for example, blood), leaving web rings 46 intact and allowing web rings 46 to be disposed at specific angles in relation to each other, as required by the patient's anatomy or by the movements of the patient's body.

[0043] While FIG. 5 illustrates that each junction bend 56 in one web ring is adjoined by connector 58 to a junction bend 60 in the adjacent web ring, only one out of a plurality of junction bends in one web ring (for example, one every three) may be adjoined to a junction bend in an adjacent web ring, providing stent 40 with larger open spaces between adjacent web rings 46. While this more open design increases stent flexibility, the scaffolding properties of

the stent are correspondingly decreased because of decreased stent density.

[0044] One aspect of the present invention is to provide an elevated degree of flexibility while retaining a closed cell structure, in which each junction bend 56 in one web ring 46 is coupled to a junction bend 60 in a neighboring web ring 46. Therefore, stent 40 is well suited for delivery and implantation at sites that require elevated flexibility and elevated scaffolding, for example, in carotid arteries. At the same time, the step-wise configuration of connectors 58 enables the use of connectors 58 which are relatively long, increasing flexibility to suit tortuous anatomies and various body movements, but through which the torsion of one web ring 46 in relation to the other is decreased or eliminated, as explained in greater detail below.

[0045] It should be observed that each of connectors 58 does not adjoin two junction bends that are longitudinally aligned, but instead adjoin two junction bends 56 and 60 that are laterally offset one in relation to the other. This offset configuration is more advantageous than a configuration linking adjacent junction bends. More specifically, a configuration with connectors 58 linking junction bends 56 and 60 that are offset one from the other provides an elevated degree of flexibility to stent 40, because in this configuration neighboring web rings have a greater ability to rotate one in relation to the other when stent 40 is deployed or becomes subjected to a bending stress.

[0046] Connectors 58 may join adjacent junction bends 56 and 60 at different points within the junction bends. For example, in the embodiment shown in FIG. 5 and, in greater detail, in FIG. 6, connector 58 adjoins essentially the middle points of junction bends 56 and 60 by extending from essentially the middle point of junction bend 56 to essentially the middle point of junction bend 60. In other embodiments, connector 58 may adjoin the lowest point in junction bend 56 with the highest point of junction bend 60, or the highest point of junction bend 56 with the lowest point of junction bend 60. It should be understood that in still other embodiments, connectors 58 may join junction bends 56 and 60 at a plurality of different points of the junction bends, and that some of the crowns 46 and connectors 58 are shown in FIGS. 5 and 6 in darkened color only for illustrative purposes and not for indicating any particular structural or design differences from the neighboring crowns and connectors.

[0047] The structure and mode of operation of connector 58 is illustrated in greater detail in FIGS. 6 and 7. More particularly, connector 58 includes a first segment 62, a second (middle) segment 64 and a third segment 66, disposed one in relation to the other in a step-wise

configuration. Within the structure of connector 58, first segment 62 couples connector 58 with junction bend 56, third connector 66 couples connector 58 with junction bend 60, while second segment 64 couples first segment 62 with third segment 66. Second segment 64 is arranged in a direction essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of body 42, while first segment 62 and third segment 66 are arranged at an angle A with respect to second segment 64, for example, 110 degrees as shown in FIG. 7. In different embodiments, connector 58 may be composed of different numbers of segments, which may further be arranged at angles of varying amplitudes, for example, between 100 and 170 degrees.

[0048] Referring now to FIGS. 7 and 8, the configuration of connector 58 is such to absorb a torsional stress applied to body 42, particularly during expansion of the stent from the contracted delivery configuration to the expanded deployed configuration. Such an ability to absorb torque is provided not only by the relative movements of first segment 62 and third segment 66, by which the widths of angle A between second segment 64 and first segment 62, and of angle B between second segment 64 and third segment 66, may change as a consequence of torsional stress, but also by the twisting motion of second segment 64 to assume an essentially helical shape. By the twisting motion of second segment 64, the torsional stress from, for example, first segment 62 is not entirely transmitted to third segment 66, but is absorbed (entirely or partially) by the twisting motion of second segment 64.

[0049] By disposing second segment 64 in a direction essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of tubular body 42, torque developing, for example, during deployment of the stent is absorbed at a much greater rate than in stent configurations having second segment 64 disposed at an angle in relation to the longitudinal axis of tubular body 42. Therefore, the connector design of the present invention absorbs torque at a greater rate than, for example, designs where the connectors between the web rings have shapes reminiscent of the letters "N" or "W", because the structure of connector 58 according to the present invention minimizes or eliminates the relative rotations of one web ring 46 in relation of a neighboring web ring 46. At the same time, second segment 64 provides for a greater scaffolding of the vessel walls than connector designs in which no step-like pattern is present, in particular, than designs having no longitudinally disposed segments. By having second segment 64 disposed essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of tubular body 42, second segment 64 can become twisted, minimizing or eliminating the distortion problems in stents of the prior art that have long connectors, and

improving surface contact of stent 40 with the vessel, within which stent 40 is disposed.

[0050] FIG. 8 illustrates in greater detail that second segment 64 has become deflected after the application of torsional stress on web structure 44, for example, when web structure 44 is expanded during the deployment of stent 40 and the web rings on which junction bends 56 and 60 are situated tend to rotate one with respect to the other. During such absorption of torque, connecting area 68 between first segment 62 and second segment 64 may become tilted in a direction opposite to that of connecting area 70 between second segment 64 and third segment 66 when second segment 64 assumes a helical disposition. This phenomenon is particularly relevant when stent 40 is manufactured by producing its shape from a tube, for example through a laser cutting process, so that connectors 58 exhibit edges that are substantially square. In one embodiment of the invention, the twisting motion of second segment 64 towards a helical disposition may be facilitated by manufacturing connector 58 with connecting areas 68 and 70 disposed not one parallel to each other, but instead at an angle one with respect to the other.

[0051] Stent 40 may be disposed into a target vessel location, for example, in a location within a carotid artery, by inserting a guide wire into the artery, and by successively translating a catheter along the guide wire that carries the stent in a contracted condition. When the stent has reached the target location, as may be determined by tracking radio-opaque markers embedded in the stent, a balloon disposed on the catheter and within the stent is inflated, causing the stent to expand from the contracted condition to the deployed condition until contact with the vessel walls is achieved. Alternatively, if the stent is manufactured from a self-expanding material, after the target location has been reached, a sheath covering the stent is withdrawn, enabling the stent to self-expand until contact with the vessel walls is made and a support structure is created.

[0052] By providing a stent having a structure formed by web elements that are disposed in web rings and that are coupled by connectors in the manner described herein, so to form a closed cell structure, an improved support is provided to the vessel walls in comparison with open cell stents, and a highly flexible structure is achieved that provides an elevated degree of scaffolding support to the vessel walls even when the vessel is bent.

[0053] Stent 40 may include different features known in the art to provide certain beneficial properties. For example but not by way of limitation, stent 40 may be coated with a therapeutic coating that includes a bioactive agent, or may contain radiopaque markers, or may be coupled to a fabric that prevents the passage of emboli from the vessel wall into the blood stream.

[0054] It should be noted that, while the invention has been described in connection with the above described embodiments, it is not intended to limit the scope of the invention to the particular forms set forth, but on the contrary, it is intended to cover such alternatives, modifications, and equivalents as may be included within the scope of the invention. Accordingly, the scope of the present invention fully encompasses other embodiments that may become obvious to those skilled in the art and the scope of the present invention is limited only by the appended claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A stent comprising:

a web structure defining an essentially tubular body expandable from a contracted delivery configuration to an expanded deployed configuration;

a plurality of longitudinally adjacent web rings defining the web structure; and

a plurality of sequentially adjoined web elements defining the web rings, the web elements being disposed substantially parallel to a longitudinal axis of the essentially tubular body when in the contracted delivery configuration, pairs of the web elements being sequentially adjoined at junction bends,

wherein a first junction bend in a first web ring is connected to a second junction bend in a neighboring web ring by a connector having a plurality of segments disposed one in relation to the other in step-wise configuration,

wherein at least one of the plurality of segments in a central position within the connector is disposed in a direction essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the essentially tubular body, and

wherein two junction bends connected by the connector are laterally offset one in relation to the other.

2. The stent of claim 1, wherein each of the web elements comprises a central member having a first and a second ends, wherein the central member is disposed essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis in the contracted delivery configuration, wherein the central member is connected at the first end to a first end member at a first obtuse angle, and wherein the central member is connected at the second end to a second end member at a second obtuse angle.

3. The stent of claim 2, wherein the first and the second obtuse angles are essentially equal.

4. The stent of claim 2, wherein the web elements of each web ring are nested one into the other in the contracted delivery configuration, and wherein the junction bends have an arcuate shape.

5. The stent of claim 2, wherein the web elements in the first web ring are oriented at approximately 180 degrees in relation to the web elements in the neighboring web ring.

6. The stent of claim 1, wherein the connector comprises three sequentially connected segments, wherein the first and the third segments are disposed essentially parallel to each other, wherein the second segment connects the first and the third segments, and wherein the second segment is disposed essentially parallel to a longitudinal axis of the essentially tubular body.

7. The stent of claim 6, wherein the first and the second segments, and the second and the third segments, are disposed one with respect to the other at angles between 100 and 170 degrees.

8. The stent of claim 6, wherein the second segment has a helical curvature.

9. The stent of claim 6, wherein the second segment is configured to become twisted upon application of a radial force on the essentially tubular body.

10. The stent of claim 6, wherein the first and third segments translate one in relation to the other upon application of a bending force on the essentially tubular body.

11. The stent of claim 6, wherein the second segment has a cross-sectional area different from the cross-sectional area of the first and third segments.

12. The stent of claim 1, wherein each junction bend in the first web ring is connected to one junction bend in one neighboring web ring by one connector.

13. The stent of claim 1, wherein the second element is coupled to the first and the second elements by connecting area having radial axes one not parallel to the other.

14. The stent of claim 1, wherein the connector is manufactured from a biodegradable material.

15. The stent of claim 1, wherein the web structure is configured to self-expand from the contracted delivery configuration to the expanded deployed configuration.

16. The stent of claim 1, wherein the web structure is configured to expand from the contracted delivery configuration to the expanded deployed configuration by application of a radial pressure to an interior surface of the essentially tubular body.

17. The stent of claim 1, further comprising a coating disposed on the web structure, the coating comprising a bioactive agent.

18. A method of stenting a bodily vessel comprising:

providing a stent having a web structure defining an essentially tubular body expandable from a contracted delivery configuration to an expanded deployed configuration, a plurality of longitudinally adjacent web rings defining the web structure, and a plurality of sequentially adjoined web elements defining the web rings, the web elements being disposed substantially parallel to a longitudinal axis of the essentially tubular body in the contracted delivery configuration, pairs of the web elements being sequentially adjoined at a junction bend, a first junction bend in a first web ring being connected to a second junction bend in a neighboring web ring by a connector having a plurality of segments disposed one in relation to the other in step-wise configuration, at least one of the plurality of segments being disposed in a direction essentially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the essentially tubular body, two junction bends connected by the connector being laterally offset one in relation to the other;

disposing the stent in the contracted delivery configuration in the bodily vessel; and

causing an expansion of the stent from the contracted delivery configuration to the expanded deployed configuration, the connector absorbing at least some of a torque applied on the stent by the expansion.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein providing the stent comprises providing the connector with three sequentially connected segments, the first and the third segments being disposed essentially parallel to each other, the second segment connecting the first and the third segments, the second segment being disposed essentially parallel to a longitudinal axis of the essentially tubular body.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein providing the connector comprises providing the first and the second segments, and the second and the third segments, disposed one with respect to the other at angles between 45 and 135 degrees.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein providing the connector providing the second segment with a helical curvature.

22. The method of claim 19, wherein providing the connector comprises providing the second segment configured to be twisted upon application of a radial force on the essentially tubular body.

23. The method of claim 19, wherein providing the connector comprises providing the first and third segments configured to translate one in relation to the other upon application of a bending force on the essentially tubular body.

24. The method of claim 19, wherein providing the connector comprises providing the second segment with a cross-sectional area different from the cross-sectional area of the first and third segments.

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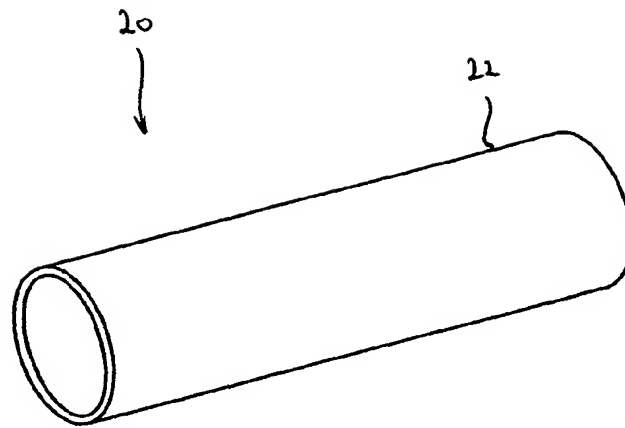


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

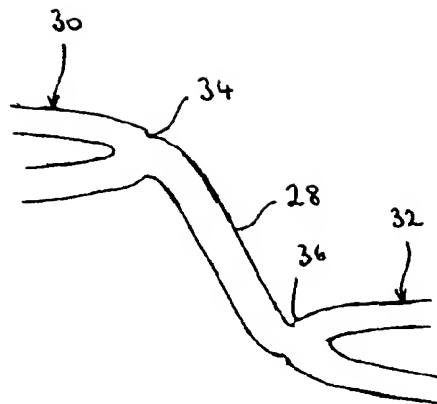


FIG. 3A
(PRIOR ART)

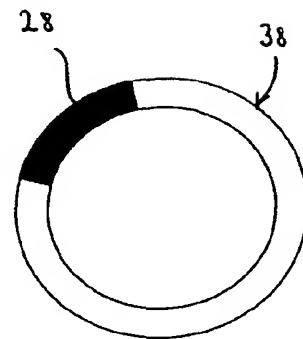


FIG. 3B
(PRIOR ART)

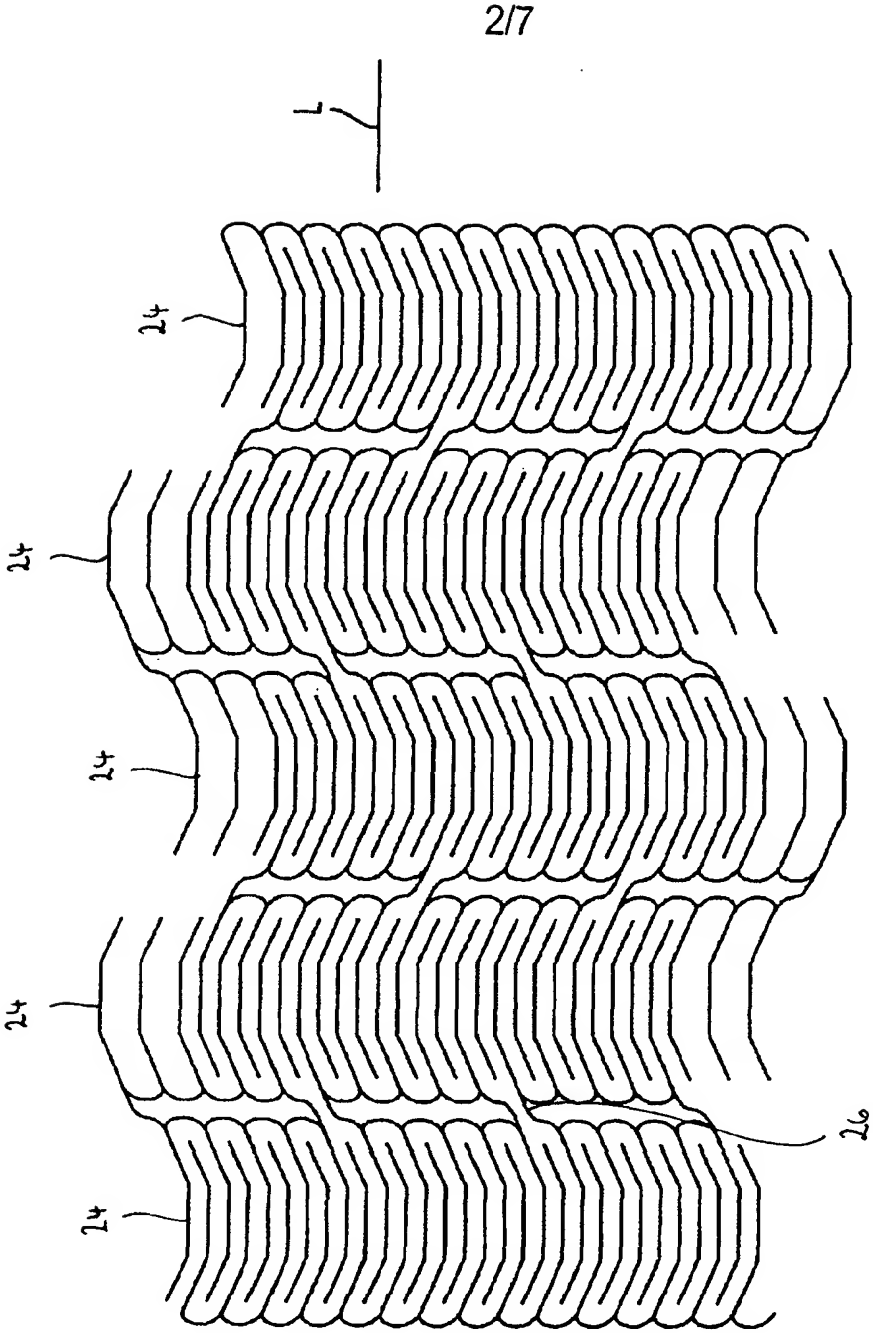


FIG. 2

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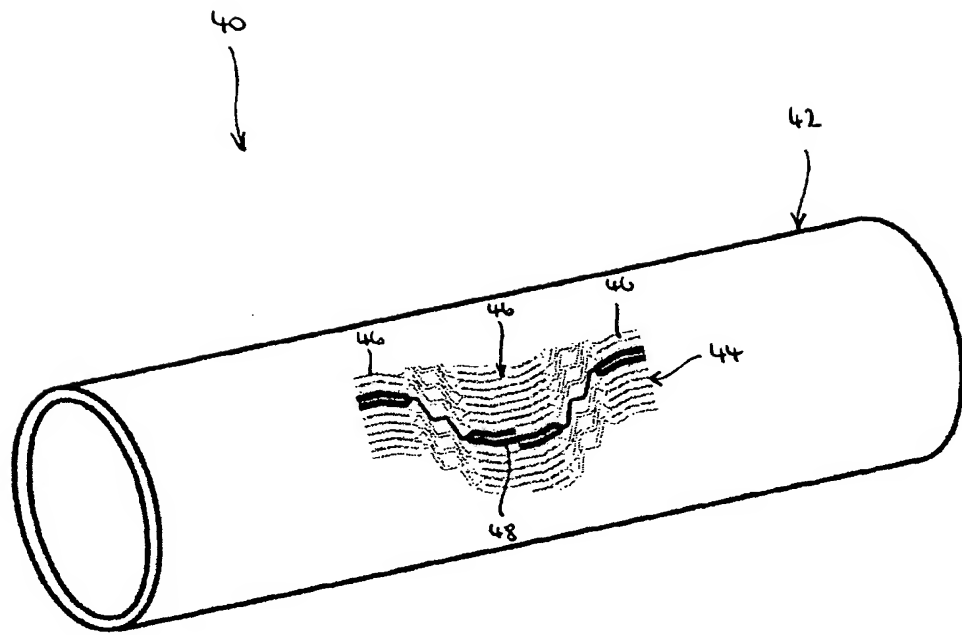


FIG. 4

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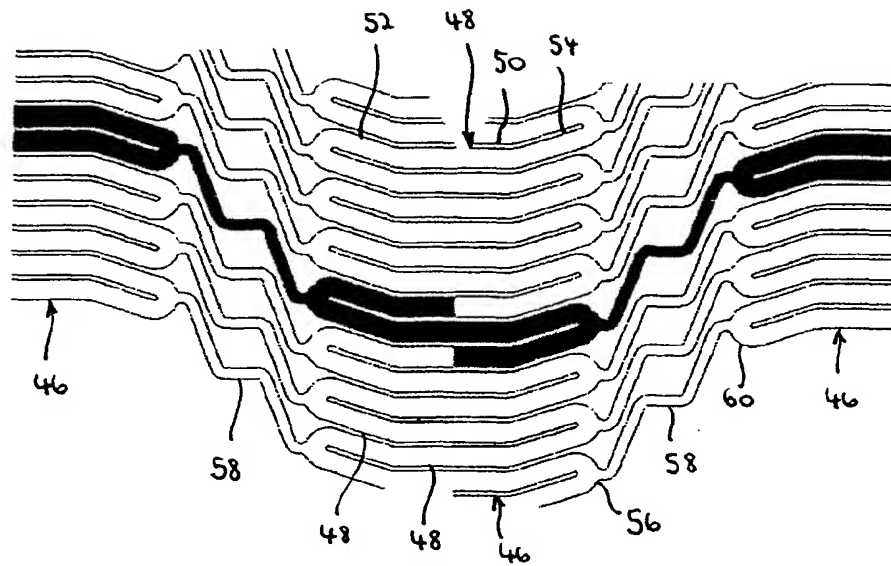


FIG. 5

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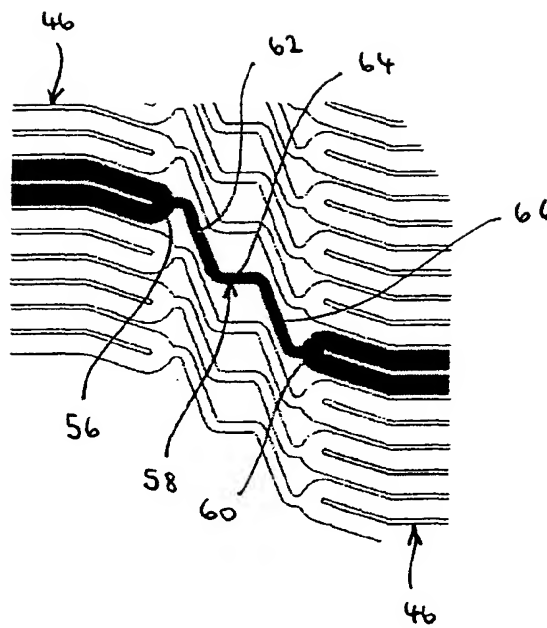


FIG. 6

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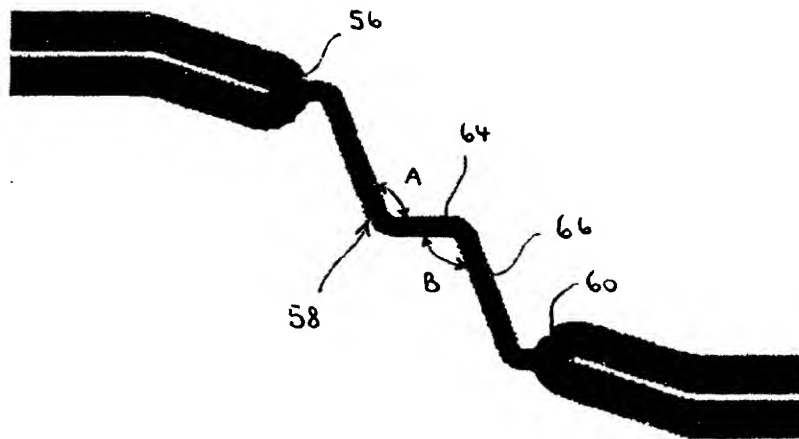


FIG. 7

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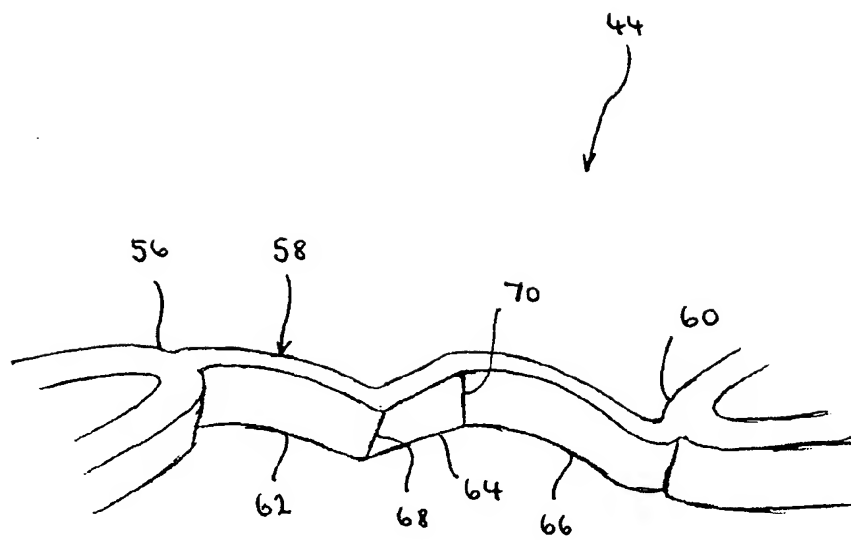


FIG. 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/EP2008/008502

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. A61F2/90

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

A61F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2006/206195 A1 (CALISSE JORGE [DE]) 14 September 2006 (2006-09-14) paragraphs [0026] - [0033]; figures 2,3 -----	1-6, 10-12, 14-17
X	WO 2004/087015 A (SCIMED LIFE SYSTEMS INC [US] BOSTON SCIENT LTD [BB]) 14 October 2004 (2004-10-14) page 48; figures 26,31 -----	1,6,7, 10-12, 14-17
X	WO 02/26164 A (JANG G DAVID [US]) 4 April 2002 (2002-04-04) page 15, line 19 - page 16, line 22; figure 5 -----	1,6,7, 10,12, 14-17

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☒ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

20 February 2009

Date of mailing of the international search report

04/03/2009

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Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Prechte1, A

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/EP2008/008502

Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☒ Claims Nos.: 18-24
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
Rule 39.1(iv) PCT - Method for treatment of the human or animal body by surgery
2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers allsearchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search reportcovers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/EP2008/008502

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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